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REMARKS OF WILLIAM J. CASEY

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before the

SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Origins of American Intelligence

How did Washington's ragtail army, some 6,000 to 8,000 men for most of the war, defeat what was then the most powerful nation in the world.

Second only to Washington's qualities as a leader in this achievement were his natural aptitude as a director and practitioner of intelligence and special operations and a master of what we know today as guerrilla warfare.

Even before Washington came to Boston to take command of the patriot forces there, vigilance groups like the Committee of Safety and Correspondence and individual patriots like Paul Revere had mounted intelligence operations.

It was this gathering of bits and pieces of information that enabled the patriots in Boston to see through the British cover story that royal troops were on the Common only to learn new military drill routines, intelligence that sent Revere and others on their famous rides to alert the citizenry of Lexington and Concord. The lanterns in the steeple of Old North Church, which sent Revere on his ride, were an example of the "early warning" which is so vital today when nuclear missiles can arrive in half an hour.

When Washington took command of the Continental Army he soon discovered that he was fighting the strongest nation in Europe virtually barehanded--without sufficient guns, ammunition, even clothing for the men willing to fight. He pleaded for help anywhere it could be found, and Britain's rivals abroad were the best prospects.

Congress responded by creating committees--in September 1775 the Secret Committee for covert and open procurement of arms and ammunition.

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To this Committee the Continental Congress appointed its strongest members--Franklin, Robert Morris, Silas Deane, John Jay, Benjamin Harrison, Richard Henry Lee, John Dickinson. But it was Morris, Franklin and Deane who did the vital work.

The Secret Committee regularized prior secret contracts for arms and gunpowder negotiated by Robert Morris and Silas Deane without the formal sanction of Congress.

Before returning to America from his early work in London, Franklin had talked to munition makers and merchants from England, Holland and France about supply and transport of guns and ammunition to the Colonies. The big mover was one Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. Trained in Paris by his father as a watchmaker, he developed into a hanger-on at Versailles. He seems to have made his initial mark by making and presenting to Madame de Pompadour a watch small enough to fit into a finger ring. Handsome, articulate, with many talents--playing the flute, harp and violin--he was soon giving music lessons and teaching watchmaking to princes at the court. Before long he was engaged in literary work, culminating in writing the comic operas "Marriage of Figaro" and "Barber of Seville." He travelled to London, Madrid, and Amsterdam, sometimes as confidential agent for Louis XV or his foreign minister, Vergennes.

Beaumarchais sold the French foreign minister on secretly providing arms and funds to American colonies, skillfully playing on the French desire to weaken Britain and their fear that the defeat or the rebellion would free British troops to seize French interests in the West Indies. By the time

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Beaumarchais completed his preparations, the Secret Committee of the Congress had sent Silas Deane to Paris as an agent to arrange financing, shipping and purchasing of guns, ammunition, and uniforms.

Deane and Beaumarchais worked well together and accumulated enough war supplies to fill eight ships. In a mere three months, huge shipments of goods were arriving to be loaded on chartered ships at Nantes, Marsailles, Bordeaux, Havre and Dunkirk--clothing, powder, guns, bullets, cannon balls, tents. Nobody has ever figured out who got how much of whose money for this. But seven of the eight ships arrived safely with guns and powder which pulled the Americans through the most critical years of the revolution.

Going back to Washington, as the force he found when he took command beseiged the British in Boston, he got all the intelligence he needed with his spy glass from Cambridge and the Bostonians who were allowed to pass through the British lines as General Gage ran out of food. But it was a different thing when Washington came to New York and found himself faced with a British army which could hop by sea or land between Long Island, Staten Island, Manhattan Island and the mainland on either side of the Hudson River. He sent out a plea for men who would go behind British lines. His first volunteer, Nathan Hale, after crossing Lond Island Sound from Connecticut to Long Island and returning to Manhattan by land going along Long Island and across the East River in a small boat, was caught as he tried to walk through British lines and executed as he proclaimed, "I regret that I have only one life to give for my country."

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After his retreat from New York through New Jersey and across the Delaware, Washington first displayed his genius as a master of hit and run guerrilla warfare in recrossing the Delaware to surprise the German garrison at Trenton, outflank the force under General Cornwallis which had pursued him from New York and again surprise the British at Princeton.

In winter quarters at Morristown, Washington's army had sunk to its lowest point. He had saved it from extinction by his daring and successful moves in Trenton and Princeton and by pledging his own personal fortune.

In New York City, Howe had at least 27,000 troops under his command and could easily have marched through New Jersey to Philadelphia in the spring of 1777. Yet, with only 3,000 effectives at the end of March, Washington was able to carry on raiding and deception activities that had Howe imagining huge American forces ready to pounce on his army, should it move through New Jersey.

Colonel Elias Boudinot, who worked with Washington on intelligence and deception, left a journal that reveals how assiduously and ingeniously Washington labored to impress on Howe an exaggerated estimate of his strength. Washington distributed his men "by 2 and 3 in a house, all along the main road around Morristown for miles." This persuaded local observers that the Americans were several times their real strength. As Washington wrote to Congress: "We are deceiving our enemies with false opinions of our numbers."

This was only the beginning. When a New York merchant showed up in Morristown claiming to be a refugee but suspected of being a British agent, Washington saw an opportunity. He told the adjutant general to become

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friendly with the New Yorker. He ordered each of his brigadiers to prepare a false strength report, adding up to a force of 12,000--triple the actual numbers. These reports were sent to the adjutant general and kept on his desk. Then the New Yorker was invited to supper, and left alone with the phony strength reports when his host was "called away." Washington knew that his strategy had worked when the New Yorker left town the next morning. In fact, this misinformation so strongly impressed Howe that he angrily rejected more accurate reports that came in subsequently. Washington was a born intelligence officer, and he continuously reinforced the initial impression he had planted in Howe's mind by staging a series of hit-and-run raids at scattered points along the British lines.

Watching General Howe in New York, Washington expected him to move up the Hudson to split New England from the other colonies or move south to take Philadelphia, seat of the Continental Congress. He sent General Thomas Mifflin to Philadelphia in April of 1777 to set up a spy system, in case Howe should succeed in occupying Philadelphia. When Howe did march into Philadelphia in September 1777, a spy network under the direction of Major John Clark was in place waiting for him.

To preserve the Continental Army and protect his supply source, Washington had to keep British forces holed up in Philadelphia and New York. General Clinton in New York had to be made to think that General Gates, fresh from his victory at Saratoga, was preparing to attack New York City, and Howe in Philadelphia had to be made to believe that Washington at Valley Forge represented an imminent threat to him.

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Clark was able to plant one of his men on Howe, who enticed the British general into expressing an interest in documents from Washington's headquarters. Washington prepared a highly exaggerated strength report and a few notes outlining some future plans, and these papers reached Howe, along with reports that Gates was planning to attack New York with the large force that Dickinson was preparing to attack Staten Island. Shortly thereafter, Clark was able to report to Washington that Howe believe the American order of battle to include 8,000 men from Gates' army.'

As he gradually developed a working intelligence network, we see Washington developing as his own intelligence chief.

The intelligence process consists of three broad steps--the collection, which is the identification and collection of the information relevant to planning decision; production, which is the evaluation and analysis of information drawing inferences and conclusions from it and relating it to planning and decision; and dissemination, which is conveying facts and conclusions to commanders and policymakers needing them.

It is no exaggeration that Washington performed all of these functions. In his letters time and again he specifies and pleads for the kind of information he needs to estimate the enemy's plans and intentions. The analysis and interpretation of the facts collected for him takes place in his own mind and his massive correspondence was a major means of conveying relevant information to his commanders and the Congress.

Washington recruited and operated his own agents until he settled upon Major Benjamin Talmadge to develop a real intelligence network for him

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sometime in 1777. Talmadge went to work establishing a spy ring in Manhattan and Long Island Sound, through Connecticut and Westchester County to Washington's various headquarters across the Hudson.

Talmadge established code names for the agents in his major network. "Samuel Culper, Sr." was Abraham Woodhull, "Samuel Culper, Jr." was Robert Townsend, and Talmadge was known as "John Bolton."

Woodhull lived in Setauket, Long Island.' Woodhull worked out of his sister's boarding house in Manhattan, recruiting helpers to pick up what British soldiers were saying in the coffee houses and taverns of New York City. The operation became more sophisticated as journalists and rebel sympathizers working at British headquarters were recruited.

Culper, Jr., was Robert Townsend, a classmate of both Talmadge and Nathan Hale at Yale. To cover his intelligence work, Townsend became a partner in a dry goods business in New York. He also cultivated the friendship of James Rivington, a Tory newspaperman, and even went so far as to finance Rivington's attempt to open a coffee house. Once this refreshment establishment was on a going basis, Townsend, posing as a Loyalist gentleman, would frequently visit the house and listen to the gossip of British officers.

Setauket, Long Island, became the nerve center of this American intelligence network reaching into New York City. Caleb Brewster, with a helper or two, would row from Fairfield on the Connecticut coast to Setauket Beach, and their whaleboat would be pulled across a couple of hundred yards of sand into Conscience Bay without alerting the British lookouts watching the channel into Port Jefferson Harbor.

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Austin Roe, who operated a local tavern, would ride the 110-mile round trip between Setauket and New York City, through territory patrolled by British troops and marauded by bandits, to carry intelligence reports. Written in invisible ink, they enabled Robert Townsend, the head of Washington's tight little intelligence network in New York, to communicate with the commander in chief.

At Setauket, Roe would leave these reports in a letter drop at Abraham Woodhull's house, across Little Bay from the home of Ann Strong. She would signal with a code based on a petticoat and six handkerchiefs on her clothes line where to find Brewster's whaleboat. After dark, Woodhull would make his way along back lanes to Brewster's boat and deliver the papers. Brewster would row back across the sound, the message would be taken to Major Benjamin Talmadge, and a series of mounted messengers posted every 15 miles would take the report across Connecticut and Westchester to Washington.

Washington himself was assidious in tasking Talmadge's network to get the specific facts he needed to assess the strength and probable movements of British forces, in suggesting ways to get reports to him more quickly, in insisting that their reports be in writing and specific and precise, in watching over them to assure their personal cover and security and the security of their messages through the use of invisible ink, which his letters always referred to as "stain" in limiting intelligence to those who had a need to know, in insisting that no expense be spared to get necessary information while watching closely that too much was not being paid. All this, as his extensive correspondence clearly shows, he attended to personally.

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In 1780, the war shifted to the south when Clinton sailed from New York with a large force. In May of 1780, the colonists suffered the worst defeat of the war in the surrender of 5,500 men to Clinton at Charleston. The fight was carried on with irregular modes of war, more deadly than the conventional American military power which had been surrendered at Charleston, launched under the leadership of three guerrilla fighers of genius, Brigadier Generals Francis Marion, Thomas Sumter and Andrew Pickens.

Small guerrilla bands, sometimes a hundred men or more, sometimes a dozen, harassed British and Tory forces and kept the flames of resistance glowing throughout the South. They would hit an enemy outpost or cut off a detachment or seize a supply train, melting away afterward into the swamps or forests and emerging again to fight another day.

Francis Marion was a lowland planter of Huguenot origin. He had fought the Cherokees, been a captain of militia and member of the Provincial Congress, and later formed his own partisan regiment. His fighting style was to move fast with small bands on little known trails, attacking with only a few rounds of ammunition per man, relying heavily on homemade cutlasses. Marion himself carried only a cutlass, which seldom got out of its scabbard, and gave his orders with blasts of a whistle. His men acquired their provisions and powder by raiding the British. On the march, they carried baked sweet potatoes and lean beef in pockets or saddlebags and drank water mixed with vinegar, the drink issued to Roman Legions on the march. When hard pressed, Marion's forces would simply disperse and fade away among the local farmers. Tarleton, the British cavalry leader, gave him his nickname. Once, trying to corner Marion and losing him in watery trails and deep swamps, he exclaimed, "This damned swamp fox, the devil himself couldn't catch him!"

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Sumter, 41 years old when the Revolution broke out, raised and commanded his own corps of irregulars as a brigadier general. Not as cautious or as thoughtful as Marion, he took greater risks and his tactics were characterized by boldness in attack with larger forces and more sustained fighting. His personal qualities were reflected in the nickname "Carolina Game Cock."

Virtually by themselves, Marion and Sumter kept a rebel force in being throughout the state. Later, Nathaneal Greene, who understood how to fight a hit-and-run war, used them along with a great militia leader, Andrew Pickens, and two great cavalry leaders, Light Horse Harry Lee and William Washington, to range far and wide and ultimately take both Carolinas away from the British. Cornwallis and Benedict Arnold, now commanding a British force, battered a small Continental force under Lafayette and chased Jefferson, then governor, out of the capitol and pursued Virginia militia into the western hills of that state.

Washington's crowning achievement was bringing his dwindling army and troops sent from France under General Rochambeau, under the nose of the main British army in New York, from Rhode Island and White Plains down to Virginia to corner Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Washington himself described how he had led General Clinton to believe he was preparing to attack New York as he and Rochambeau started out on their march to Virginia. He wrote:

"It was determined by me, nearly twelve months beforehand, at all hazards, to give out, and cause to be believed by the highest military as well as civil officers, that New York was the destined place of attack, for

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the important purpose of inducing the eastern and middle states to make greater exertions in furnishing specific supplies, than they otherwise would have done, as well as for the interesting purpose of rendering the enemy less prepared elsewhere.

"It was never in contemplation to attack New York, unless that Garrison should first have been so far degarnished to carry on the southern operation as to render our success in the siege of that place, as infallible as any future military success can ever be made.

"That much trouble was taken and finesse used to misguide and bewilder Sir Henry Clinton, in regard to the real object, by fictitious communications, as well as by making deceptive provision of ovens, forage and boats, in the neighborhood, is certain: Nor were less pains taken to deceive our own army; for I had always conceived, where the imposition does not completely take place at home, it would never sufficiently succeed abroad..."

Washington planted reports and double agents on Clinton in New York and filled his mail pouches with false information.

In April 1781, the British captured a patriot courier, Montaigne, leading one of Clinton's generals to note: "I am confirmed in my idea from reading the intercepted letter from General Washington...that he will never venture to move southward." As Montaigne recalled after the war, Washington personally gave him the pouch and dictated the route to be taken. When Montaigne protested that taking the specified route would result in certain capture, Washington stiffened and said, "Your duty, Sir, is not to talk, but to obey."

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A British agent, James Moody, was allowed to capture a mail pouch containing a letter from Washington to Lafayette which said:

"Upon full consideration of our affairs in every point of view--an attempt upon New York...was deemed preferable to a Southern Operation."

There were also many agent reports advising of specific elements of the New York attack plan, properly attributed to loose-lipped American officers. American patrols were exploring all the side roads. Cannons were emplaced. Officers scouring the Jersey shore for small boats were jubilant and boasted openly of certain victory in New York.

We know that all this deception worked from a letter Clinton wrote on June 8, 1781, to Cornwallis in Virginia which said:

"I enclose to your Lordship copies of some intercepted letters; by these your Lordship will see we are threatened with a siege...Your Lordship will see by Lafayette's letter that you have little more opposed to you than his corps and an unarmed militia...Your Lordship can, therefore, certainly spare two thousand, and the sooner they come the better...From all the letters I have seen, I am of the opinion...the enemy will certainly attack this post." (Meaning New York)

Major Benjamin Talmadge, Washington's intelligence chief, described it:

"General Washington entirely deceived the British general by marching his combined force down New Jersey opposite New York, as if he intended investment of that city. After maneuvering a few days in September opposite Staten Island (all) of a sudden whole army were found in full march for the Delaware

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River, which they crossed at Trenton, and then proceeded on to the head of the Elk, where they embarked to move down the Chesapeake Bay for Yorktown, where Lord Cornwallis had taken his station."

Washington put together the fundamental ideas of modern revolutionary warfare. He won the war without winning a major battle, as Greene liberated the Carolinas while losing every battle he fought. For seven years Washington kept the main British force bottled up in New York or Philadelphia. As long as Washington and Greene kept an army in being, to prove that the British were not overrunning the country, recruits would flow in to replenish American losses, and militia and guerrilla bands would keep Loyalists out of action and whittle away at British regulars. The two armies which did venture into the countryside, Burgoyne's and Cornwallis', were cut up and devastated as they were lured farther and farther from their seaport bases and their supplies and troops became more and more exhausted. The defeat of Burgoyne's army at Saratoga generated the political decision in Paris to get into the war, and the defeat of Cornwallis' army at Yorktown destroyed the political will in London to continue the war.

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